



REPORT

From the office of the...

SRA External Affairs Commissioner

TO: Members of the Student Representative Assembly
FROM: Victoria Liu, External Affairs Commissioner
SUBJECT: SRA 16P Report
DATE: March 12th, 2017

NOTE TO THE READER

This report is meant to outline the progress that the External Affairs (EA) Committee has made throughout the last month. Currently we are in the process of wrapping up a few final projects, but are in good shape to complete the goals set out in the External Affairs Year Plan.

I hope this report provides a comprehensive summary of our progress, but please do not hesitate to ask questions. To all students and engaged SRA members, the commissioner and committee member elections will be fast approaching in the next month, and I hope that students can be engaged in learning more about the External Affairs committee, and how to become involved.

PROGRESS ON YEAR PLAN

Objective 1: Policy Updates

This month, the External Affairs Committee has been focusing a lot of its time on the creation of the Indigenous Students Policy. Please see the SRA 16N report details regarding the first half of the policy process.

Since the last update, our team has worked to create Principles, Concerns and Recommendations (PCRs), write body text for the policy, and achieve feedback.

PCRs were written by January 30th by the policy team, and a meeting was held with to review the PCRs with members who were able to attend. Here we reviewed some of the wording, and discussed additional ideas that could be added into the policy. For example, we discussed how to appropriately recognize traditional Indigenous land usage, and how to best go about including it in our policy. We identified areas where the policy was lacking, and other resources that could be used to incorporate different perspectives. For example, MISCA worked together with the MSU last year to create a document of recommendations that we wanted to ensure made it into our policy.

After this meeting, some sections were revised, but ultimately, the policy was divided into sections for students to write body text. The goal of writing the body text under PCR clusters was to provide background information on our principles and concerns, and evidence for our recommendations as a union. This will hopefully make the policy more comprehensive for not only students, but for organizations and individuals that the MSU lobbies. The authors on the policy have worked hard to ensure that many points within the PCRs are backed up within the body text, and have found relevant evidence to support our recommendations.

Within the policy process, ideas were incorporated from consultations, focus groups and additional student perspectives to ensure that policy addressed relevant principles, concerns and recommendations. This policy is meant to represent a vast number of students who may have different experiences. We hope that if there are any additional points that should be added, students will come forth to provide feedback. We have tried our best to incorporate many perspectives that the MSU has taken note of in the past two years.

In the past month, we have also worked to communicate with Indigenous groups and programs on campus to receive feedback. To make the feedback process accessible, groups were contacted early (Feb 13-20th). Groups across campus were contacted including: the Cooperative of Indigenous Students and Alumni, McMaster Indigenous Student Community Alliance, The Haudenosaunee Student Alliance, The Indigenous Studies Program, and the Indigenous Education Council. Although the rough draft of the policy is now complete and will be sent out to students, we hope that we can incorporate any other relevant feedback during the policy conference on March 11th. We welcome the SRA to also contribute feedback.

The Policy Conference will be held on March 11th, and edits to the policy will be made by March 12th for the passing of policy statements by the SRA. I will provide an update at the March 12th meeting and describe some of the changes made to the policy through feedback. At this time, we are hoping that any additional feedback from Indigenous groups or faculty on campus can also be addressed.

Objective 3: Sustainability Campaign

This term, at the end of March, the External Affairs committee will also be hosting a sustainability campaign in partnership with Advocacy Street team. So far, the two ideas that will be focused in on this campaign will be moving to reusable water bottles, and also creating awareness about recycling on campus. These are two key aspects of sustainability that the MSU will be focusing on this year, and the goal is to create awareness among students and engage as many students as possible.

Katie Pita and Saima Ahmad will be organizing the sustainability campaign on behalf of the External Affairs Committee. Currently the team is working to create a promotional video with individuals within the MSU that will encourage good recycling practices. I am excited to see the finished product in the coming weeks. Promotional materials will also include posters and graphics to engage students.

Objective 6: Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA)

Applications for OUSA were reviewed, and interviews were conducted the week of Feb. 6th to Feb. 10th. I am excited to reveal that there were many interested applicants for OUSA GA this past term, with great applications which made the review process quite difficult. Interviews were held from Feb. 8th to February 10th, and a final set of 6 individuals were chosen to attend the general assembly.

OUSA GA took place this past weekend at Queen's University, and delegates took part in providing feedback on 3 policies: International Students, A Comprehensive Access Strategy and Municipal Affairs.

I am happy with the amount of interest that was present from students. For next year, it can be suggested that OUSA general assembly be widely publicized and promoted to gain interest from students from outside of the MSU, so that they can be engaged in an amazing advocacy opportunity.

Other objectives:

I am pleased to say that with the hard work from the committee, we have had success in completing most of our objectives this year. We will be ending off the year with completion of the objectives that I have provided a brief description of in this report.

PAST EVENTS, PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES

Indigenous Students Policy + Policy Con:

Please reference progress on year plan section of the report.

- Policy completed by the committee Feb. 25th, 2017
- Feedback achieved during the period of Feb. 25th to the policy con date
- Policy Con, March 11th, 2017: to gain feedback from students about the principles, concerns and recommendations included within the policy
- Policy brought to the SRA meeting: March 12th, 2017

OUSA Interviews:

Please reference the progress on Year Plan Objective 6

- OUSA interviews conducted Feb. 6th to Feb. 10th
- Gathered a lot of interest from students, and many qualified and eager applicants!
- 6 students chosen to attend the OUSA GA
- Date: March 3rd to March 5th to discuss policies regarding: A Comprehensive Access Strategy, International Students, and Municipal Affairs

UPCOMING EVENTS, PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES

Sustainability Campaign:

In partnership with the Advocacy Street Team, External Affairs will be working on the sustainability campaign, mostly focused on the aspect of recycling. Katie Pita and Saima Ahmad will take the lead of this campaign. Through this campaign, the team is hoping to consult with facility services to learn more about recycling guidelines.

To engage students in sustainability, the campaign will include a video and infographics. Please see Progress on Year Plan objective 3 for further details.

Transition:

As the year is coming to a close, the External Affairs committee has participated in many projects. In the next coming month, following the commissioner election, I hope to be able to provide the incoming commissioner(s) with guidance for the upcoming school year, and be able to inform them of existing initiatives, responsibilities of the external affairs commissioners, and even some projects that could be continued or improved upon. I think that the transition is very important to ensure continuity from year to year. Although not part of my platform, I see this as an essential component to ensure that the next commissioner can come in with ease, and be able to ask questions and learn more about the role.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

Within the last couple of months, something that I see as a current challenge, and foresee as a challenge for next year is the continuity within the External Affairs commissioner position. This was also a challenge that was brought up by community partners, such as the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce.

The McMaster Students Union roles have a high rate of turn over. By this I mean that individuals working within the students union only take part in their role for 1 year, after which time the responsibility is passed onto another passionate individual who has the ability to shape their year and their platform with their own experiences. Due to this, for external partners, it may seem like there is a lack of continuity or ability to engage with student groups on campus. This has been a challenge this year when engaging with external groups. If there will be no continuity in the later years, it is more difficult to work on certain projects or initiatives that are not addressed, or are introduced toward the end of the year (i.e. initiatives in Municipal Advocacy week). To minimize this challenge, I hope to be able to transition my successor into my role, and point out significant areas where they would be able to continue existing partnerships or initiatives.

The creation of the Indigenous Students Policy was also a challenge. This policy involved a lot of collaborations, engaging many students from outside of the committee, and conducting focus groups. Fortunately the committee was able to start earlier (last term) to be able to take part in these valuable consultations, but had this not been done, the timelines for the policy would have been difficult to meet. Thus, this was a challenge that was manageable

through early starts to the project and work done over the reading week and Christmas break.

VOLUNTEERS

This month there have been both challenges and successes with engaging volunteers on the committee. One of my goals within my year plan was to ensure that not only were members of the committee engaged, but that the External Affairs Committee could reach out to other members within the university. I also wanted to ensure that members were enjoying their time and work on the committee, and could contribute in ways that were meaningful.

Something that has constantly been a challenge is to get students on the committee involved in writing policy. The policy process is quite rigorous, and involves quite a bit of work, which is often a deterrent for many students who have other responsibilities within the committee. This term, to overcome this challenge, I reached out to not only students on the committee, but students who were involved in campus groups or were interested in taking part in the Indigenous Students Policy. This was extremely important for this policy to provide an opportunity for Indigenous Students to become involved within advocacy efforts within the MSU. Typically, members within committees have tried to incorporate feedback from students within these policies, but this term it was found that there were many advantages to allowing students to convey their challenges and recommendations that were present around the McMaster Community. Student volunteers brought their enthusiasm to work on the policy as well as a vast array of experiences that were used to enhance the relevance of the policy.

To engage students in committee work, I am proud to say that 2 committee members, Saima and Katie, will be leading the sustainability campaign. In the past, the planning process is usually started by the External Affairs Commissioner, or Advocacy PTM, which leaves little for members to be engaged with. I hope that this provides a great opportunity for members to take on a leadership role within the committee and engage other students.

SUCCESSSES

I would like to congratulate all of the members who worked throughout the term on the Indigenous Students policy. This year the policy process has been quite rigorous. It included focus groups, consultations, principles, concerns and recommendations feedback, and finally the writing and editing of the policy process. Creating the policy would not have been possible without the team.

I would also like to thank all of the students and staff who contributed ideas towards the policy. We hope that this policy can well represent a vast number of Indigenous students on campus, and it can be used for meaningful advocacy work in the future.

The amount of interest gathered for OUSA GA was also a success. We were very excited to see that many students were interested in participating in advocacy, and were eager to learn about the topics that were being addressed. In the future I hope that the External Affairs Committee can

partner with the education team to ensure that OUSA GA is promoted to engage students from across the university to take part in this amazing opportunity.

OTHER

Thank you for taking the time to read about the progress that the External Affairs Committee has made in the past month. Please feel free to message me with any questions about the External Affairs Committee progress. If you are interested in joining the committee in the following year, or would like to learn more, I would be happy to answer any questions!

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Victoria Liu". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'V' and 'L'.

Victoria Liu
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